Trump admin pressured Facebook into removing ICE-tracking group



Trump slammed Biden for social media “censorship”

Trump and Republicans repeatedly criticized the Biden administration for pressuring social media companies into removing content. In a day-one executive order declaring an end to “federal censorship,” Trump said, “the previous administration trampled free speech rights by censoring Americans’ speech on online platforms, often by exerting substantial coercive pressure on third parties, such as social media companies, to moderate, deplatform, or otherwise suppress speech that the Federal Government did not approve.”

Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) last week held a hearing on his allegation that under Biden, the US government “infringed on

the First Amendment by pressuring social media companies to censor Americans that held views different than the Biden administration." Cruz called the tactic of pressuring social media companies part of the "left-wing playbook," and said he wants Congress to pass a law "to stop government jawboning and safeguard every American's right to free speech."

Shortly before Trump's January 2025 inauguration, Meta announced it would end the third-party fact-checking program it had introduced in 2016. "Governments and legacy media have pushed to censor more and more. A lot of this is clearly political," Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said at the time. Zuckerberg called the election "a cultural tipping point toward once again prioritizing speech."

In addition to pressuring Facebook, the Trump administration demanded that Apple remove the ICEBlock app from its App Store. Apple responded by removing the app, which let iPhone users report the locations of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers. Google removed similar Android apps from the Play Store.

Chicago is a primary target of Trump's immigration crackdown. The Department of Homeland Security says it launched Operation Midway Blitz in early September to find "criminal illegal aliens who flocked to Chicago and Illinois seeking protection under the sanctuary policies of Governor Pritzker."

People seeking to avoid ICE officers have used technology to obtain crowdsourced information on the location of agents. While crowdsourced information can vary widely in accuracy, a group called the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant & Refugee Rights says it works to verify reports of ICE sightings and sends text alerts to local residents only when ICE activity is verified.

Last month, an ICE agent shot and killed a man named Silverio Villegas Gonzalez in a Chicago suburb. The Department of

Homeland Security alleged that Villegas Gonzalez was “a criminal illegal alien with a history of reckless driving,” and that he “drove his car at law enforcement officers.” The Chicago Tribune said it “found no criminal history for Villegas Gonzalez, who had been living in the Chicago area for the past 18 years.”

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